

Belmont Hall (Residence)
Near Smyrna, Delaware

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HABS No. Del-120 ✓

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Delaware

Historic American Buildings Survey
Weston H. Blake, District Officer
909 West Street, Wilmington, Delaware

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BELMONT HALL (Residence)
Near Smyrna, Kent County, Delaware,
State Road One Half Mile South of Smyrna.

Owner: Cummins Speakman.

Date of Erection: 1753.

Present Condition: Good. In 1771 it was enlarged, burned in 1882 and rebuilt by Governor Thomas Collins.

Number of Stories: Basement and two and a half for main body of mansion, lower service wing in rear.

Materials of Construction: Masonry cellar, brick walls.

Other Existing Records: "Some Historic Points in Delaware", by National Society of Colonial Dames of Delaware.

Additional Data: This mansion has some unusual features to be noted. The front is impressive. The cornice has character being unusually heavy, and repeated in the pediment which is truncated to introduce a captain's walk with balustrades. The proportion of the length of the facade, to the narrowness of the end, is extreme, and is emphasized by the placing of the pediment on the long axis. The small lights in the side pediment windows are disturbing. The heavy flat arches and key block of wood, simulating stone, are common in this vicinity.

Laussat R. Rogers

Approved

Robert B. Hall
District Officer

3/10/37 - KW

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
BELMONT HALL (THOMAS COLLINS HOUSE)HALL
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Location: On the east side of Route 13 on the south edge of town, Smyrna, Kent County, Delaware

Present Owner: Mrs. Cummins E. Speakman

Brief Statement of Significance: Belmont Hall, home of Thomas Collins, Brigadier-General in the American Revolution and eighth president of the Delaware State, has two late seventeenth century rear wings and a main, front block built in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. The simple rear wings are typical of their period while the main block is representative of the most elegant building in Delaware.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Belmont Hall is justly accounted one of the handsomest homes of Colonial Delaware. Approached by a straight driveway through the tall trees of a surrounding park, the stately Georgian brick house of three stories faces southwest.

The five-bay front is gabled, and the broad truncated gable is topped by a railed deck. There is a central hall with stair.

To the northeast, or rear, are two parallel brick wings of earlier date. Built in the latter part of the seventeenth century (not long after the 600-acres tract was granted by Penn in 1684), these were the eastward projections from a coeval structure that was replaced, after the middle of the eighteenth century, by the present western part of the house.

The west front displays all the elegance of the finest eighteenth-century creations; the eastern wings present a sharp contrast in their robust pre-Georgian simplicity.

There is excellent paneling and other woodwork.

BELMONT HALL (THOMAS COLLINS HOUSE)

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Thomas Collins, who is credited with the present architectural aspect of Belmont Hall, was High Sheriff of Kent County in 1767 and was for four years a member of the Council. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War he was a member of the Council of Safety; he was a leading member of the first Delaware Constitutional Convention in 1776; he was Speaker of the Assembly in 1778; in 1779 he was State Senator from Kent; and from 1777 to 1783 he was Brigadier-General of Delaware State Militia. In 1782 he was appointed Chief Justice of the Court of Pleas and of the Orphans' Court. In 1786 he became the eighth President of the Delaware State by election of the General Assembly. During his Presidency Delaware promptly ratified the United States Constitution and became the "First State." Thomas Collins died in 1789 during his term as President.

In 1777 the State Council of Delaware met on at least one occasion at Belmont Hall because it seemed safer than the usual meeting place. But no part of the State, that was accessible by water, was safe from hostile incursions when "British vessels could patrol Delaware Bay" and River, or when "British emissaries and sympathizers /of whom there were many/could hold frequent communication with the shore, landing at night and causing terror to the inhabitants."

To meet this insidious peril, Thomas Collins fortified his grounds with a stockade and posted a sentry on the railed deck atop the house. One dark night a marauder crept up to the house and shot the sentry on the roof. To commemorate this tragedy, the Elizabeth Cook Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution has placed a tablet in the hall, to the right of the door on entering.

Belmont Hall is still in possession of descendants of the original owners.

Prepared by Harold Donaldson Eberlein
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
June 1960

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Reference: Dorothy and Richard Pratt, A Guide to
Early American Homes--South (New York:
McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1956), pages 55-56

Supplemental
Information: The following is inscribed on a
tablet fixed to the southeast wall of
the entrance hall:

In honor of the Sentinel
who during the
American Revolution
was mortally wounded by
a British bullet, on
the watch tower of
Belmont Hall, Delaware
the Headquarters of the
Patriots, and the House of
Gov. Thomas Collins,
Brig. Gen. of the Delaware
Militia in 1777
Erected by the
Daughters of the American Revolution
of Delaware
1909